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Rafsanjani Named Chief Commander Of Iranian Forces

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CAIRO, Egypt, June 2—Iran's powerful speaker of parliament, Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, today assumed the role as commander-in-chief of Iran's armed forces with a mandate from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to reorganize the military after two serious defeats in the land war with Iraq and a costly naval clash with the United States.

Tehran Radio and Iran's state news agency announced that Khomeini, the country's 87-year-old spiritual leader, issued an edict relinquishing constitutional title of commander-in-chief to Rafsanjani. The country's president, Ali Khamenei, who also sits as chairman of Iran's Supreme Defense Council, was reported to have urged Rafsanjani's appointment, calling him "the only suitable person to be assigned this important responsibility."

Rafsanjani, a 53-year-old clergyman, has not received any formal military training.

In the wake of parliamentary elections during April and May, the appointment is the clearest indication to date that Rafsanjani has emerged as an even stronger political force at the top of Iran's revolutionary elite.

Rafsanjani's most important constituent, Khomeini, has for the second time in six months responded to calls from his proteges in the highly factionalized government to consolidate power and give the Rafsanjani-led forces more authority to manage the economy and, now, the war.

In a commentary, Tehran Radio said, "It is hoped that this transfer of power will be the beginning of major developments on the battlefield."

Iran has suffered a number of setbacks in recent battles against Iraq. On April 17, Iraqi forces dislodged Iranian occupation forces from the southern Faw Peninsula, and on May 25, Iraq pushed Iranian troops from the eastern outskirts of the southern port city of Basra back to the international border.

The day after the Faw defeat, six Iranian warships were sunk or heavily damaged when they engaged U.S. Navy vessels as they destroyed two Iranian oil platforms. The U.S. attack was in retaliation for an Iranian mine explosion that damaged the frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts.

After the Faw defeat, Khomeini removed the Army chief of staff,



HASHEMI RAFSANJANI
... "the only suitable person"

Brig. Gen. Ismael Sohrabi, and replaced him with an officer with more solid revolutionary credentials, Col. Ali Shahbazi.

In today's edict, Khomeini authorized Rafsanjani to reconstruct the armed forces command and to set up a "general command headquarters and organize the full coordination of the armed forces, the Revolutionary Guards, the security forces and volunteer mobilization forces."

Military analysts who monitor the nearly eight-year-old Iran-Iraq war have noted that in recent campaigns there appeared to be a lack of coordination between Iran's regular armed forces and the Revolutionary Guards, whose leadership has built parallel ground, air and naval units under a separate command structure.

Some analysts have suggested that Iran's debilitated Air Force and underfunded regular Army have failed to come to the assistance of Revolutionary Guards under attack at Faw and east of Basra.

Khomeini, in today's edict, stressed the importance of "complete unity" in the military and charged Rafsanjani with developing "specific objectives" in training, logistics and defense industries.

Rafsanjani has for some time carried the title of Khomeini's representative on the Supreme Defense Council and has been deeply involved in planning and directing military campaigns such as the occupation of Faw in February 1986 and the seizure of territory outside Basra in January 1987, which cost Iran an estimated 70,000 casualties.